## "Crazy"—Patsy Cline (1961)

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Patsy Cline

Original release label

Owen Bradley

In 1954, music producer Owen Bradley and his brother, Harold, purchased a decrepit Nashville mansion and later added a steel-frame and metal-covered Quonset Hut to the rear of the house. This created Bradley's recording studio. Bradley's son, Jerry Bradley, recalled how his father and uncle improvised the sonic space, using old curtains, pieces of wood made into louvers, and raw insulation covered with burlap to make the room workable. "My dad had a way of dealing with materials to acoustically fix a room," Jerry Bradley said. "Owen and Harold, they tuned that room by trial and error, and with their ears."

At his newly-built studio, Bradley employed many of the best musicians in Nashville. His favorite lead guitarist was Grady Martin, a well-known and skilled session player. Martin had come off a Tennessee farm unable to read music but, by age 21, had developed a style of playing all his own-hard edged without being abrasive. (Think of the opening riff of Roy Orbison's "Pretty Woman.")

It was in this makeshift studio, with Martin on guitar, that "Crazy" was recorded on August 21, 1961, between 7:15pm and 11:15pm. A few days later, Patsy Cline completed her vocals. It was produced by Bradley with Walter Haynes on steel guitar; Harold Bradley on six-string electric bass; Bob Moore on acoustic bass; Buddy Harmon, drums; and Floyd Cramer on piano and organ. The legendary Jordanaires (Gordon Stoker; Hoyt Hawkins; Neal Matthews, Jr.; Ray Walker) acted as the song's chorus.

In later years, Harold Bradley related that recording Patsy Cline proved to be an altogether different kind of experience. "We had no headphones. We had no musical scores. My brother came up with the arrangements." Harold Bradley remembered Cline as being "very, very intense about her music."

The session for "Crazy" came only a few months after Cline and her younger brother were involved in a serious June of 1961 automobile accident. Cline had been thrown through the auto's windshield, had her face scarred, her right hip knocked out of its socket, and her right wrist fractured. She was hospitalized for more than a month and was even temporarily immobilized. Her doctors anticipated at least two months of recovery, but they had never dealt with the determination and work ethic of Patsy Cline.

By August 1961, Bradley and Cline returned to the studio. She and Bradley had not recorded in nine months but starting on August 17, and working until the month ran out, they recorded fourteen songs--about one-sixth of her entire body of work—including the classic "Crazy."

These sessions were rare two-part sessions for Bradley who recorded them in three-track stereo. An early advocate of three-track recording, Bradley built layered musical sessions—Patsy Cline on one track and all the rest on the other two tracks. He encouraged Patsy to take risks in her singing—with pauses, sighs, and lingering over her words—that, he judged, added emotional power to the lyrics.

With a new sound in mind, Owen Bradley looked for musicians to complement Patsy's vocal timbre. He had added Cramer on piano and Harman on drums--two instruments then uncommon to Nashville. Bradley asked his brother Harold to switch to a solid-body, six-string Fender electric bass and to work a more complex rhythm with Moore's acoustic bass and Harman's drum kit. If we listen closely for the beat of "Crazy," the acoustic bass playing of Moore becomes readily apparent. Moore played the acoustic bass in the first of Patsy Cline's recording sessions and would play in all but one of her Nashville recordings.

Harold Bradley summed up his brother's accomplishments: "My brother had the ability to conceive the whole song in his head and then he asked us to help him create that sound." Indeed, Bradley started these Decca sessions teaching Patsy, the Jordanaires, and the musicians what he wanted for each song—by demonstrating on the piano. (Said Bob Moore, "I can tell you, Owen had soul. He was a great piano player.") Then the "A Team" members taught themselves their assigned parts, as none could read music. Patsy sang from lyrics she placed in front of herself on a music stand, after she had committed the melody and phasing to memory.

With these musicians, Owen Bradley developed for Patsy Cline a new strain of popular music. The piano and the electric guitar became the centerpieces, replacing country's acoustic guitars and banjos. The backing vocals by the Jordanaires reminded teen rock fans of their work with Elvis. Bradley wanted to make popular music that would sell broadly.

But this August of '61 recording session for "Crazy" was aborted, or at least incomplete. As she began to lay down her vocal track, Patsy decided she could not sing up to her own personal standards. Halting herself, she returned a few days later to record her vocals--in one take.

What role this extra time played in her performance is unknown and debatable. But however it occurred, the vocal Bradley and Cline achieved certainly works. Bradley had arranged Willie Nelson's demo tape for Patsy so that it would be in her vocal "comfort zone." Bradley made sure she would be using the strongest and most beautiful part of her voice most of the time. Thus, Cline's "Crazy" is personalized for her with subtle but pervasive alterations to the pitches and rhythms different from those found on Willie Nelson's demo.

Bradley was also able to bring out the complexity in Patsy's vocal phrasing. She seemed vocally at ease, and her expression of the pain of lost love became her defining style. She and Bradley had worked together long enough for Bradley to match more melodic and emotional material with her expressive, unique voice. Bradley incorporated her distinctive pauses, elongation of notes, and slidings from phrase to phrase. This practiced and arranged expressiveness meant that the "hurting songs" did express *real hurt*, as in "Crazy."

"Crazy" ranks as the most praised of all of Patsy Cline's songs. "Crazy" divides into an "A" section, then a variant of this "A" section, followed by a "B" section, and finally a second variant of the "A" section—sung twice—with a modulation for the repeat singing of "A", a half step higher. This 32-bar pop song starts in the key of B-flat and then moves to B-major for a dramatic and emotional closing. Most popular music uses a major scale, but "Crazy" moves immediately to an unstable C-minor on the word "lonely," so that Patsy can obtain a bluesy quality through frequent use of notes outside the major scale. This iteration establishes the Patsy Cline recording as something different. The second phrase of "A", "crazy for feelin' so blue,"

moves subtly across tones, and almost as an afterthought, moves smoothly back to set up the first variant of the "A" section, which follows the same harmonic pattern as the original "A" section: tonic, supertonic, dominant, then tonic (B-flat). This modulation of tonics is repeated in the second "A" variant increasing the rhythmic and harmonic motion and adding a great deal more complexity. Cline's verbal outburst of "I'm crazy for tryin' and crazy for cryin'" is set to a stepwise, descending set of harmonies, and the resolution is postponed to the end of the phrase, which closes with a three-measure tag in the new key.

"Crazy" is characteristic of the late Patsy Cline style, with a wide range of vocal intonation and numerous melodic leaps, notably the downward one on the first word ("Crazy") and the upward one on "for feelin"." When arranging from the demo, Bradley masterfully combined the main rhythmic motif with two contrasting melodic motifs. "Crazy, crazy, I knew, someday" features descending intervals, while "lonely" and "wanted" ascend. Patsy sings broken chords, conveying tension and frustration. The rhythmic material of "Crazy" is remarkably economical, through repetition and variation, combined with melodic contrast, as Bradley arranged for the listener a sense of familiarity without monotony.

Decca released "Crazy" on October 16, 1961 and it shot to #2 on the country, #9 on the pop and #2 on the easy listening charts and remained a hit though the Christmas season. On November 27, 1961, two days before her appearance at Carnegie Hall, Decca released Cline's second album, "Patsy Cline Showcase," which featured "Crazy" among its cuts. On Wednesday, November 8, 1961, three weeks before her Hall appearance, Patsy performed on ABC's "American Bandstand"--singing "Crazy"—which enabled the song to cross over to the pop charts. As a 45rpm, it sold well during the age of "The Twist" by Chubby Checker.

Patsy Cline remains a much beloved singer, even though she died in 1963. Unlike most singers from the past, she has not faded into obscurity and the popularity of "Crazy" remains; more than 100 other artist have covered "Crazy," from Willie Nelson to Shirley Bassey to the Hawk Arps Jazz Band, Norah Jones and Johnny Mathis.

This long-term popularity should not be confused with simplicity; "Crazy," is complex popular music that appeals across generations, with Patsy Cline's version the standard bearer. Millions have heard the official session version produced by Owen Bradley, and have encoded this as the "correct" version. Listeners store the correct version of "Crazy" in their brains, and recognize how close a tribute artist might be to the "real" Patsy Cline song. They encode the ornaments of her voice, the timbre of her voice, and the sonic tone of the Bradley studio. This is what makes her fans experts. But no singer can replicate Patsy Cline's singing skills and so no wonder Patsy Cline's singing has appealed to ensuing generations.

TV shows and films have often featured "Crazy" over the years. During the summer of 1991, Hollywood released "Doc Hollywood," starring Michael J. Fox and Julie Warner. Fox played Benjamin Stone, an ambitious young doctor who loses his way while driving to Los Angeles and, after a comic mishap, is sentenced to community service in a podunk town. There, he gradually falls for the pretty ambulance driver named Vialula (Warner). Will they fall in love? Of course, but in plot twist, she woos him while they are dancing to "Crazy," in a sequence of just dance and music. The movie sequence lasts two minutes and 29 seconds, the exact length of the recording.

On the September 19, 1991, season premiere of "The Simpsons," father Homer has gotten himself into a mental institution and his wife, Marge, tries to call the hospital and is put on hold. What plays while she waits? Patsy Cline's "Crazy." Here Cline's song takes on a new meaning of irony based, simply, on its title. A year later, H. Ross Perot used "Crazy" as the theme song for his ill-fated run as a third-party candidate for President of the United States.

On January 16, 1996, MCA issued a CD called "The Nashville Sound: Owen Bradley." MCA asked the man who produced 27 of Patsy Cline's 29 recording sessions to select his ten favorite productions among all artists he had ever worked with. Bradley chose one each from Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty, Kitty Wells, Jack Greene, Red Foley, Webb Pierce, Brenda Lee, and Ernest Tubb but two from Patsy Cline: "Sweet Dreams" and "Crazy."

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